

Jennifer Addis: Recipient of 2011 National Park Service Award

By Patricia Pintar

Jennifer Addis of Hancock has quite a story. The most recent chapter of that story took her to Washington, D.C. on Nov. 3 to receive a prestigious award from the National Park Service. The beautiful and striking award she received that day states, “The 2011 National Volunteer Accessibility Achievement Award is presented to Jennifer Addis for superior accomplishments in advancing the concept of “Universal Access” within the National Park Service.”

The first chapter of Jenny’s story begins in March of 1997 after a car accident left her paralyzed from the chest down. The driver of the car was intoxicated and Jenny has been in a wheelchair ever since. Not only has this young woman come through a profound life-changing event, she has done so with an amazing outlook that touches many people. Overcoming personal challenges and hardships that could have broken a lesser spirit, Jenny has found strength and purpose by reaching out to help others. As a motivational speaker, Jenny is spreading the message to high school and college students and other groups about drunk driving. Fundraising for the Byron Reisch Foundation for medical research for spinal cord injury has been an important continuing commitment for Jenny as well.

Back in 2007, the Waushara Chapter of the Ice Age Trail began exploring the possibility of an accessible spur-trail on the recently acquired Bohn Lake property. Jenny was invited to be part of the planning sessions for the project and she joined the Waushara IAT. Due in large part to Jenny’s enthusiasm and energetic fundraising talents, the \$20,000 project was completed in July of 2009 and the Bohn Lake Ice Age Trail Alliance accessible trail segment became part of the National Scenic Trail system. The five-foot-wide path, covered with crushed limestone, runs the entire length of the quarter-mile trail. Hand-crafted benches along the way allow hikers and wheelchair users to enjoy the beautiful scenic overlooks of pristine Bohn Lake.

A grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony at the trailhead on Oct. 10, 2009 honored all the volunteers and donors who contributed in some way to the project. The Operating Engineers Union in Waushara County had donated labor and equipment, significantly covering costs related to preparing the base for the trail. Additional funds raised came from the Byron Reisch Foundation, and many, many private and local donors.

“It was awkward to be nominated for this award because I look at this project as such a group effort,” Jenny said. “To be singled out was uncomfortable for me at first. Then, after I got passed that awkwardness, I realized this was going to be such a great adventure, and I would be able to bring this award home for all of us who contributed,” she said.

Jenny is currently the membership coordinator for the Waushara Chapter of the IATA (Ice Age Trail Alliance). In June of this year, at a three day trail building event, Jenny met Daniel Watson, who is a volunteer coordinator for the National Park Service from Minnesota. “I get to deal with the ‘people aspect’ of the job, meeting the volunteer trail builders and members at these events. Dan helped me with registration,” she said. “During a slow time in the afternoon, I wanted to take my iPad and go out on the Bohn Lake accessible trail for a while to do some writing,” she said. “I’d like to write a book about my experiences someday and this is a good place to write.”

Dan asked if he could join her on the trail. “We spent the afternoon together and talked about a lot of things, and I connected with him,” Jenny said. “Dan is a ‘giver’ with a big heart, very dedicated to his job. He asked a lot of questions about my connection to the IATA. Now we have this new friendship,” she said.

Not long after that, Dan emailed Jenny to let her know he had nominated her for the 2011 Volunteer Accessibility Achievement Award. The next letter Jenny received made it official. She was invited to Washington D.C. on Nov. 3 to accept the award for the Bohn Lake Accessible Trail Project.

“The NPS paid for everything; all travel and expenses,” Jenny said. “I was able to bring my caregiver, Shaina Klassy of Wautoma, too. Shaina has been with me a long time,” she said. “We had a video camera along and did a sort of a documentary. From the time we flew out of Milwaukee the day before, we filmed the airport and when we were on the plane,” she said. Shaina videotaped some of the two hour award ceremony when Kay Ellis of the NPS read off all the awards.

“The other recipients were a great group of individuals, dedicated to helping others who would not ordinarily be able to participate with these kinds of outdoor activities,” she said. “I was the only volunteer in the group in a wheelchair. The others were employees of the NPS,” Jenny said.

Truly a spokesperson for accessibility for all abilities, Jenny continues to pro-



A grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony at the trailhead on October 10, 2009 honored all the volunteers and donors who contributed in some way to the project. Randy Lennartz, Waushara IATA coordinator; Andy Janicki, DNR accessible coordinator, Jenny Addis; Mike Wollmer, IATA executive director; Mike Bergum, DNR Parks manager; A.J. McCaskey, IATA board member.



The beautiful and striking award Jenny received says, “The 2011 National Volunteer Accessibility Achievement Award is presented to Jennifer Addis for superior accomplishments in advancing the concept of “Universal Access” within the National Park Service.” She was invited to Washington D.C. on Nov. 3 to accept the award for the Bohn Lake Accessible Trail Project.



Due in large part to Jenny’s enthusiasm and energetic fundraising talents, the \$20,000 project was completed in July of 2009 and the Bohn Lake Ice Age Trail Alliance accessible trail segment became part of the National Scenic Trail system. The five-foot wide path covered with crushed limestone runs the entire length of the quarter mile trail.

mote her mission. Her website, www.inspirationspeaks.me/, says it clearly: “My personal mission is to motivate and educate a diverse society by speaking through inspiration. I intend to use my experience to empower the human spirit and inspire others, disabled or able-bodied, to discover their own inner strengths.” Highlights of some recent activities and coming events for Jenny underscore this mission.

Jenny has recently begun writing a column for the website Mobilewomen.org, an online magazine for women. Her column, called, “Hey, Jen,” is for anyone to ask a question, not only women with disabilities. Written with skill and style, Jenny’s column addresses questions and concerns related to living with disabilities. Her answers are straightforward and positive, revealing her warm heart and passionate advocacy.

On Oct. 12, the Discover Wisconsin TV Show came to Waushara County to film and to learn more about what’s happening on the Ice Age Trail. Jenny led students from the Coloma Elementary School and the Discover Wisconsin Crew on a tour of the Bohn Lake Accessible Hiking Trail. The show will air in April on PBS so watch for dates and times.

Jenny has accepted a speaking engagement in Faulkton, SD on Jan. 23-24 to speak to high school and elementary students and their parents about issues of drinking and driving. In these sessions, students will learn about underage drinking, and making good decisions. Parents attending will learn about outlining a plan and contracting with their children to help them deal with these issues.

Jenny will be speaking about the NPS Award and showing the documentary they made at IATA Annual Conference & Membership Meeting in Madison in April 2012. The annual meeting draws IATA members from all twenty-four chapters around the state for this three day event. The story continues for this remarkable young woman.

The Waushara County IATA Chapter will hold the Thirteenth Annual Sweetheart Candlelite event Feb. 4, 2012 at Bohn Lake. Organizations or individuals who wish to learn more about the Ice Age Trail may contact Randy Lennartz, Waushara Chapter Coordinator at 920-787-2333.